

# Fiscal year 2020 South Carolina Retirement System Member Handbook



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## Disclaimer

Benefits administrators and others chosen by your employer to assist you with your participation in the employee benefit programs administered by the South Carolina Public Employee Benefit Authority (PEBA) are not agents or employees of PEBA and are not authorized to bind PEBA or make representations on behalf of PEBA.

## General information

The South Carolina Retirement System (SCRS) is a defined benefit retirement plan administered by the South Carolina Public Employee Benefit Authority (PEBA) for employees of state agencies, public and charter school districts, public higher education institutions, and other local subdivisions of government that have joined SCRS, as well as individuals first elected to the South Carolina General Assembly at or after the general election in November 2012. This handbook provides a general introduction to SCRS and its plan benefits. If you are eligible and elect to participate in the State Optional Retirement Program (State ORP) defined contribution plan in lieu of SCRS, contact your State ORP service provider for information regarding the administration of your benefits.

## Membership and enrollment

Your employer will initiate the retirement enrollment process. You will need to provide a valid email address to your employer. Then, you will make your plan election when you respond to the *Retirement Plan Election* email you receive from PEBA.

You have 30 days from your date of hire to make your decision. If you do not make a selection within that time period, you will automatically become a member of SCRS. You must complete an enrollment election regardless of the plan you intend to select. If you have not yet made your

decision, please refer to the [Select Your Retirement Plan](#) guide and the ["It's Your Choice: SCRS or State ORP"](#) video on [PEBA TV](#), our YouTube channel.

Membership is mandatory as a condition of your employment with a covered employer unless you are in a position or classification of employment specifically exempted from membership by statute. Other classifications, such as non-permanent employees, have the option to elect non-membership within 30 days from their date of hire, unless the employee already has an SCRS account. Your employer should let you know if your employment falls into one of these categories. Newly hired employees of state agencies, public school districts and higher education institutions may choose participation in the State ORP instead of SCRS within 30 days of their date of hire. However, if a member is employed by two covered employers, he must continue membership in his original retirement plan.

Your SCRS membership starts when you earn compensation from a covered employer and make contributions to your SCRS retirement account. You are considered an active member if you are working for an SCRS covered employer, earning service credit and making regular contributions to an SCRS retirement account, and you have not retired or terminated from covered employment. You must be an active member to be eligible for most of the benefits described in this handbook.

## Class Two and Class Three membership

Currently, there are two classes of membership: Class Two and Class Three.<sup>1</sup> Class Two members are generally employees who currently have earned service credit in SCRS or a correlated retirement system for a period of service prior

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<sup>1</sup>Class One membership is no longer available.

to July 1, 2012. Class Three members are those members who do not currently have earned service in SCRS or a correlated retirement system for a period of service prior to July 1, 2012.

A period of withdrawn service or a period of participation in the State ORP does not count toward the earned service credit used to determine whether a member is Class Two or Class Three unless the member has completed a service purchase to establish earned service credit in SCRS for the period of withdrawn service or State ORP participation.

### Employee contribution rate

Members of SCRS contribute 9 percent of their gross pay, tax-deferred, into their SCRS retirement accounts. Employer contribution rates to the system are set by a statutory schedule, subject to additional increases to meet certain funding requirements.

### Member compensation limit

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) imposes a federal compensation limit under the Internal Revenue Code (IRC), Section 401(a) (17). This limit, also referred to as a cap, is placed on the amount of annual compensation which may be taken into account for purposes of calculating pension contributions. Employees who became members of SCRS or PORS, or participants in State ORP prior to January 1, 1996, are not subject to the annual compensation limit. Employees who became members or participants in the plans on and after January 1, 1996, are subject to the compensation limit as adjusted by the commissioner of the IRS for increases in the cost of living in accordance with Section 401(a)(17) of the IRC. **The calendar year 2019 compensation limit (cap) is \$280,000.** Compensation in excess of this limitation is not subject to retirement contributions.

### Interest on your SCRS account

Your active SCRS account earns 4 percent interest compounded annually on your balance as of the previous June 30 until you retire or your account becomes inactive. An account is considered inactive when no contributions have been made to the account in the preceding fiscal year and no other active, correlated system or State ORP account exists.

### Correlated systems

PEBA administers several other defined benefit retirement systems for public employees and officials. Two of these other systems, the Police Officers Retirement System (PORS) and the General Assembly Retirement System (GARS), are correlated systems with SCRS. If you have contributions in more than one of these correlated retirement systems, your service credit is maintained separately within each system; however, your service credit is added together to determine your eligibility for a retirement benefit. Although this service is combined for eligibility purposes, the amount of your benefit from each system is still calculated based only upon your service credit in that system.

For example, if you are an SCRS member with 10 years of service credit and were previously a member of PORS with 15 years of service, you would be considered to have 25 years of service credit for the purposes of determining your eligibility for a retirement benefit.

## Designating beneficiaries for your account

The retirement benefits administered by PEBA also offer options for you to help provide for your survivors in the event of your death. As an active member, you have the option to designate three types of beneficiaries for your retirement account:

- Primary beneficiaries for your in-service death benefit (see Page 8) or refund of contributions (see Page 12). Multiple beneficiaries would share equally in a survivor monthly benefit;
- Contingent beneficiaries in case of death of the primary beneficiaries. All primary beneficiaries must be deceased before any contingent beneficiaries will be paid; and
- Incidental death benefit beneficiaries (see Page 8).

You may name your estate as a beneficiary for your account; however, monthly benefit payments cannot be paid to an estate. As an active member, you may change your beneficiaries at any time before retirement.

## Online access to your SCRS account

[Member Access](#) is PEBA's online portal that allows SCRS members to manage their retirement account. It's safe, secure and available anytime from anywhere you have internet access.

### Active members may:

- View their designated beneficiary information;
- View their current service credit;
- View and print their member statement;
- Update their contact information;
- Create a benefit estimate;
- Calculate an unofficial cost estimate to purchase service credit;
- Submit a service purchase request;

- Submit and view the status of their refund request; and
- Submit and view the status of their service retirement application.

### Retired members may:

- Update their contact information;
- Change their tax withholdings;
- View and print a 1099-R form;
- View and print a monthly benefit verification letter;
- View and print an insurance premium letter;
- View their current payment method;
- View payment history;
- Change their payment method from paper check to direct deposit; and
- Modify an existing direct deposit account or add an additional direct deposit account.

### Inactive members may:

- View and print their member statement; and
- Update their contact information.

If you haven't registered for Member Access, you may do so by selecting the [Member Access](#) button at [www.peba.sc.gov](http://www.peba.sc.gov). From there, select Register Now to start the process.

## Purchasing additional service credit

Active members may establish additional service credit for various types of previous employment and leaves of absence, and up to five years of non-qualified service, which is a type of service credit not associated with any specific employment. Generally, a member on leave without pay from a covered employer is not eligible to establish service credit of any type.

You may establish service credit through a lump-sum payment, a pre- or post-tax installment service purchase or a tax-deferred rollover from

an Individual Retirement Account (IRA), a 401(k) plan, a 401(a) eligible plan, a 403(b) plan or a 457 plan. The interest rate for an installment service purchase is calculated at the prime rate plus 2 percent. Installments initiated July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2020, will be calculated at 7.5 percent. The interest rate is fixed for the term of the installment.

You may establish each type of service credit once within a fiscal year. If you are establishing service to meet retirement eligibility, contact the Customer Contact Center at 803.737.6800 or 888.260.9430 for more information. Payment for service purchases must be made in full prior to your retirement date or termination from employment. If you are terminated from covered employment within one year of retirement eligibility, you have five business days after the date of termination to purchase any service credit that you are otherwise eligible to purchase. If you previously established service credit for periods of part-time service or previously earned service credit for periods of part-time service prior to July 1996, you may be eligible to establish additional service credit at an additional cost. Please contact the Customer Contact Center at 803.737.6800 or 888.260.9430 for more information.

One factor used to determine the cost of most types of service credit purchases is your career highest fiscal year earnable compensation. This includes any salary earned during a period of withdrawn service, regardless if the withdrawn service has been established through a service purchase. This also includes earnable compensation received while participating in State ORP if you have purchased SCRS service credit for any State ORP participation. The cost to purchase periods of less than one year will be prorated. You may not establish SCRS service credit for a period of service, other than military service, for which

you may also receive a retirement benefit from another defined benefit retirement plan or for a period of service for which you already have credit in SCRS. You also may not establish SCRS service credit if doing so would violate Section 415 or any other provision of the Internal Revenue Code.

A Class Three member who purchases a period of withdrawn service or State ORP participation for any period of covered employment rendered prior to July 1, 2012, will revert to Class Two membership.

Some types of purchased service may not be used in determining eligibility for retiree health insurance. If you are covered by the state's employee health insurance program, contact the Customer Contact Center at 803.737.6800 or 888.260.9430 for eligibility information. If your employer does not participate in the state's employee health insurance program, contact your employer for information about insurance in retirement.

## Types of service

### Public service

As an active member, you may establish SCRS service credit for any period of paid public service as an employee of the government of the United States, a state or political subdivision of the United States, by making an actuarially neutral payment to PEBA. The cost calculation is based in part on your current age and service credit, as well as your career highest fiscal year earnable compensation at the time PEBA receives your service purchase request. The cost, which is determined by PEBA's independent actuary, will not be less than 16 percent of your career highest fiscal year earnable compensation for each year purchased.



## **Educational service (K-12)**

As an active member, you may establish service credit for any period of paid classroom teaching consisting of grades kindergarten through 12 in a public, private or sectarian school by making an actuarially neutral payment to PEBA. The cost calculation is based in part on your current age and service credit, as well as your career highest fiscal year earnable compensation at the time PEBA receives your service purchase request. The cost, which is determined by PEBA's independent actuary, will not be less than 16 percent of your career highest fiscal year earnable compensation for each year purchased.

## **Military service**

As an active member, you may establish up to six years of service credit for any period of military service for which you do not already have service credit in SCRS, PORS or GARS by making an actuarially neutral payment to PEBA. This includes service in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, Select Reserves and the Army or Air National Guard. The cost calculation is based in part on your current age and service credit, as well as your career highest fiscal year earnable compensation at the time PEBA receives your service purchase request. The cost, which is determined by PEBA's independent actuary, will not be less than 16 percent of your career highest earnable compensation for each year purchased.

Your discharge from service must be under conditions other than dishonorable. Under guidelines set forth by the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), you may also arrange in advance with your employer to continue contributing to your account while on active duty military leave or make the contributions after returning from military

leave within a period three times longer than your military leave, but not more than five years.

## **Leave of absence**

If you return to covered employment as an active member within four years of an employer-approved leave of absence, you may purchase service credit for the employer-approved leave period for which you do not already have service credit, up to a maximum of two years per leave of absence. The leave of absence must be with an employer covered by one of the retirement systems administered by PEBA. You may establish this service by making an actuarially neutral payment to PEBA. The cost calculation is based in part on your current age and service credit, as well as your career highest fiscal year earnable compensation at the time PEBA receives your service purchase request. The cost, which is determined by PEBA's independent actuary, will not be less than 16 percent of your career highest fiscal year earnable compensation for each year purchased.

## **Workers' compensation**

As an active member, you may establish service credit for a period while on a leave of absence and receiving workers' compensation benefits. The cost is based on contributions plus interest using your earnable compensation at the time of injury. You may also arrange in advance with your employer to continue contributing to your account while you are receiving workers' compensation benefits.

## **Previously withdrawn SCRS service**

If you left employment and received a refund of your contributions plus interest from SCRS, you may re-establish this service upon returning to active membership. You must repay the amount you withdrew plus interest to the date your request is received. Previously withdrawn earned

service that is re-established in SCRS is considered earned service for the determination of the SCRS minimum service requirement for benefit eligibility. Please note that earnings associated with a re-established withdrawal will be considered for possible inclusion in the calculation of a member's average final compensation. A Class Three member who purchases a period of withdrawn service for any period of covered employment rendered prior to July 1, 2012, will revert to Class Two membership.

### **Non-qualified service**

Active Class Two and Class Three members who have five or more years of earned service credit may establish up to five years of non-qualified service by making an actuarially neutral payment to PEBA. The cost calculation is based in part on your current age and service credit, as well as your career highest fiscal year earnable compensation at the time PEBA receives your service purchase request. The cost, which is determined by PEBA's independent actuary, will not be less than 35 percent of your career highest fiscal year earnable compensation for each year purchased.

### **State ORP service**

Active members may purchase service credit for their years of participation in the State ORP by making an actuarially neutral payment to PEBA. The cost calculation is based in part on your current age and service credit, as well as your career highest fiscal year earnable compensation at the time PEBA receives your service purchase request. The cost, which is determined by PEBA's independent actuary, will not be less than 16 percent of your career highest fiscal year compensation for each year purchased.

State ORP participation that is established in SCRS is considered earned service for the

determination of the SCRS minimum service requirement for benefit eligibility. Please note that earnings associated with established State ORP participation will be considered for possible inclusion in the calculation of a member's average final compensation. A Class Three member who purchases a period of State ORP participation for any period of covered employment rendered prior to July 1, 2012, will revert to Class Two membership.

## **In-service death benefits**

### **Active member incidental death benefit**

If, as an active member, you die in service with at least one year of service credit and your employer provides incidental death benefit coverage, a payment equal to your current annual earnable compensation will be paid to your designated beneficiary. If your death results from a job-related injury, the one-year requirement is waived.

Amounts paid to your designated beneficiary are subject to ordinary federal and state income taxes. It is up to your designated beneficiary to request that state taxes be withheld from the payment. PEBA is required to withhold federal taxes of 20 percent on the incidental death benefit payment unless your designated beneficiary rolls over the money into another qualified retirement plan.

A designated beneficiary who is a spouse may roll over the incidental death benefit payment into an IRA, a 401(k) plan, a 401(a) eligible plan, a 403(b) plan or some 457 plans.

A non-spousal beneficiary may roll over the incidental death benefit payment into an inherited or beneficiary IRA only.

Your designated beneficiary should check with an accountant or a tax advisor about his tax liability, or visit the IRS's website at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) and the website for the tax agency in the state in which



he resides. In South Carolina, visit the South Carolina Department of Revenue's website at <https://dor.sc.gov>.

State agencies, the General Assembly and public school districts automatically provide incidental death benefit coverage to their employees; however, coverage is optional for other employers. If an employer elects to provide incidental death benefit coverage for its employees, the employer must pay the required contribution rate for the coverage.

### Retirement account benefits

If you die in service as an active member, your designated beneficiary will be entitled to receive a refund of your employee contributions plus the interest earned on your account regardless of your age and years of service credit at the time of your death.

Your designated beneficiary will be eligible to choose a monthly benefit instead of a refund of your employee contributions plus the interest earned on your account if:

- You are a Class Two member with at least five years of earned service credit and either have at least 15 years of total service credit or you are at least 60 years of age at the time of your death; or
- You are a Class Three member with at least eight years of earned service credit and either have at least 15 years of total service credit or you are at least 60 years of age at the time of your death.

### Disability retirement benefit

A member of SCRS may receive disability retirement benefits from SCRS only if the member has been approved for disability benefits from the federal Social Security Administration, which generally requires an incapacity to perform any gainful occupation.

### Who may apply

Becoming disabled does not automatically qualify you for a disability retirement benefit; you must file an application and go through the review process. You must be in service with an employer covered by SCRS in order to file an application for disability retirement benefits. A member is considered to be in service on the date the application is received by PEBA if:

1. The last day the member was employed by a covered employer was no more than one year before the date PEBA received the application; and
2. The member had not been retired on a service retirement allowance for more than one year at the time PEBA received the application.

If PEBA does not receive your application while you are in service, you will not be eligible to receive any disability retirement benefits from SCRS. Retired members who work for a covered employer are not eligible to apply for a disability retirement benefit.

In addition to being in service, you must also meet certain earned service requirements to apply for disability retirement benefits. If you are a Class Two member, you must have at least five years of earned service credit toward retirement unless your disability is the result of an injury arising out of and in the course of the performance of your job duties. If you are a Class Three member, you

must have at least eight years of earned service credit toward retirement unless your disability is the result of an injury arising out of and in the course of the performance of your job duties.

### **Coordination with other benefits**

You may arrange with your employer to make your retirement contributions through your employer if your disability requires you to be placed in an employer-approved leave status while receiving workers' compensation benefits. Doing so will ensure that you continue to earn retirement service credit during your workers' compensation leave period. Do not wait to apply for a disability benefit until your workers' compensation claim is finalized. Many workers' compensation claims are often settled after covered employment has ended. If your disability claim is denied, the continuance of paying retirement contributions and earning retirement service credit may be important to your long-term retirement plans.

**You must file your application while you are in service with a covered SCRS employer even if you have not yet been approved for Social Security disability benefits.** Because of the length of time the Social Security disability application can take, do not wait to apply for SCRS disability retirement benefits until your Social Security disability claim has been approved.

### **How to apply**

You should file your application for disability retirement as soon as you become disabled and while you are still in service with an employer covered by SCRS. Either go to the PEBA website at [www.peba.sc.gov](http://www.peba.sc.gov) or contact the Customer Contact Center at 803.737.6800 or 888.260.9430 to obtain a disability retirement packet. When you file your disability retirement claim, please complete all of the forms in the disability retirement packet. You do not, however, need to include any medical

records from your health care providers. If PEBA receives your disability retirement application more than one year after you terminate from all covered employment under SCRS or more than one year after the date of your service retirement, you will not be eligible to apply for a disability retirement benefit.

The date your application is actually received by PEBA is the date used to determine whether the application was timely filed. You have to be approved for Social Security disability benefits in order to receive a disability retirement benefit from SCRS.

### **Acknowledgement of receipt**

If you do not receive notification in the mail confirming PEBA's receipt of your application within 10 days after submitting it, please contact the Customer Contact Center at 803.737.6800 or 888.260.9430. If you are eligible for service retirement when you become disabled, you may apply for a service retirement benefit and begin receiving a monthly benefit while awaiting determination of your disability claim. You will receive only one type of payment, so if your disability claim is approved, you will need to decide whether to continue to receive your service retirement benefit or to begin receiving a disability benefit.

### **Processing the claim**

The evaluation of your disability claim depends on when you send your Social Security award letter to PEBA. Once PEBA receives your Social Security award letter, your claim for an SCRS disability benefit can be evaluated. Please note that you will not be eligible for an SCRS disability benefit if the disability onset date established by the Social Security Administration is more than one year after the date of your termination from

employment. Please remember that, because your SCRS disability retirement application must still be filed while you are in service, you should not wait to submit your disability retirement application to PEBA until your Social Security disability claim has been decided.

### **Effective date of a disability benefit**

Once you have provided a copy of the Social Security award letter to PEBA, your SCRS disability benefit will be effective the later of the disability onset date established by the Social Security Administration or the day after your termination from employment. Retroactive benefits will be paid back to the later of these two dates.

The disability retirement benefit will be based upon your years of credited service at retirement, average final compensation at retirement and the current benefit multiplier for service retirement benefits. However, the annual benefit may not be less than 15 percent of your average final compensation.

### **Continuing disability review**

If you have not yet reached age 65, you must provide a document indicating your continued receipt of Social Security disability benefits to PEBA each year. PEBA must receive this annual continued receipt document within 30 days after the anniversary date of your SCRS disability retirement.

Failure to produce documentation of your continued receipt of Social Security disability benefits within 30 days after the anniversary date of your SCRS disability retirement will result in suspension of your SCRS disability benefit. Your SCRS disability benefit will be reinstated if you provide the necessary documentation of your continued receipt of Social Security disability benefits within one year of the anniversary date of

your SCRS disability retirement. Failure to produce documentation within one year of the anniversary date of your SCRS disability retirement will result in the permanent termination of your SCRS disability benefit.

### **Returning to employment while receiving a disability retirement benefit**

If you are under age 65 and receiving an SCRS disability benefit, you should report earnings from any gainful (public or private) employment to PEBA annually because there is an earnings limitation for all employment which is applied on a calendar-year basis. You may earn the difference between your adjusted average final compensation (AFC) at retirement and your disability benefit without affecting your benefit.

Your AFC may be adjusted each year for inflation for earnings limitation purposes only. This increase generally matches the percentage of the annual increase in the Consumer Price Index for Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W). These adjustments affect the amount you can earn while receiving a disability benefit; however, they do not affect the amount of your benefit. You will receive a letter each February advising you of how much you can earn and requesting confirmation of your prior year's earnings. You will have to repay any benefits you received to which you were not entitled. If you earn more than the difference between your adjusted AFC and your disability benefit, your monthly benefit will be reduced or possibly canceled. If you return to work with an employer covered by one of the retirement systems administered by PEBA and your annual earnable compensation is equal to or greater than your adjusted AFC, your disability benefit ceases and you must become an active member of the system. After age 65, a disability retiree is subject to the same earnings limitation as a service retiree

(see Page 20).

## Additional information

Because a disability retiree must annually establish continued approval for Social Security disability benefits in order to continue to receive an SCRS disability retirement benefit, any post-retirement employment that causes a disability retiree to no longer receive Social Security disability benefits will also result in the discontinuance of the retiree's SCRS disability retirement benefit. For more information about returning to employment while receiving Social Security disability benefits, see *Working While Disabled: How We Can Help*, which is available from the Social Security Administration at [www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10095.pdf](http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10095.pdf).

## Leaving before retirement

If you leave your job and terminate all employment covered by one or more of the retirement systems administered by PEBA before you are eligible to retire, you have two options concerning your contributions:

- Request a refund of your employee contributions plus the interest earned on your account; or
- Leave your funds in your SCRS account. Your account will continue to accrue interest until your account becomes inactive. Your SCRS account is considered inactive when no contributions have been made to the account in the preceding fiscal year and no other active, correlated system or State ORP account exists.

## Request a refund

If you have terminated all employment covered by one or more of the retirement systems administered by PEBA and wish to receive a refund of your accumulated employee contributions

plus the interest earned on your account, you must submit a refund request in [Member Access](#) or complete a [Refund Request](#) (Form 4101) and return it to PEBA. You may submit your refund request immediately upon termination; however, by law, your refund cannot be paid sooner than 90 days after your termination, and may not be paid later than six months after the date of your request. If you are working for two or more covered employers and contributing to more than one retirement account (i.e., working two jobs and paying into an SCRS and a PORS account), you must stop working in all correlated systems to request a refund from any account.

If you receive a refund, you forfeit your rights to any future service retirement or disability benefit. Employer contributions are not refunded. Instead of having the refund paid directly to you, you may choose to roll over the funds into an IRA, a 401(k) plan, a 401(a) eligible plan, a 403(a) plan, a 403(b) plan or some 457 plans.

PEBA is required to withhold federal taxes of 20 percent on the taxable portion of any refund that is eligible for a rollover but is not transferred directly into another qualified retirement plan. If you do not take advantage of a rollover as indicated above and are under the age of 59 ½ at the time of distribution, your distribution will not only be subject to regular income tax, but you may also be subject to a 10 percent penalty tax on the taxable portion of your distribution when you file your income tax return, unless certain exceptions apply.

See Special Tax Rules in [IRS Publication 575](#) and [IRS Form 5329](#) for more information on this tax penalty and the exceptions to the penalty.

Be sure to check with an accountant or a tax advisor about your tax liability, or visit the IRS's website at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) and the website for the tax

agency in the state in which you reside. In South Carolina, visit the South Carolina Department of Revenue's website at <https://dor.sc.gov>.

## Leave funds on deposit

When you leave your money in your SCRS account, you retain your years of service credit, which may be added to any future service you may accrue should you later become employed in a position covered by one of the correlated retirement systems administered by PEBA. Your account will continue to earn interest until it becomes inactive. An account is considered inactive when no contributions have been made to the account in the preceding fiscal year and no other active, correlated system or State ORP account exists. You may apply for a refund at a later date or apply for a service retirement benefit upon reaching eligibility. No action is required if you wish to retain your membership and leave your funds on deposit, but it is your responsibility to keep PEBA informed of your current address as well as any name or beneficiary changes. You can make certain updates to your account information through [Member Access](#) (see Page 5 for more information).

## Service retirement

A good way to begin the planning process for retirement is to attend a one-day preretirement seminar offered by PEBA. Sessions are held regionally in the fall. The seminar schedule and registration information can be found online at [www.peba.sc.gov/events](http://www.peba.sc.gov/events). If you are considering retirement, you may obtain a consultation by telephone or in person at our office. Simply contact the Customer Contact Center at 803.737.6800 or 888.260.9430 or visit our office. Visitors are seen on a first-come, first-served basis.

## When to apply

You must file an application with PEBA to retire;

it is not automatic. You may file your application as early as six months prior to your desired effective date of retirement but no later than 90 days afterward. We encourage you to file your application as early as possible. You can apply for retirement through your [Member Access](#) account. Retirement applications and other forms are also available at [www.peba.sc.gov/rforms.html](http://www.peba.sc.gov/rforms.html), or you may contact the Customer Contact Center at 803.737.6800 or 888.260.9430 to request these forms.

If you do not receive notification of PEBA's receipt of your application within 10 days after submitting it, contact the Customer Contact Center at 803.737.6800 or 888.260.9430. **Please do not terminate employment until PEBA has verified your service credit and you receive written notice of your retirement eligibility from PEBA.** This notice will be sent to you in the mail and is entitled, *Notification of Retirement Eligibility and Estimated Benefit*. Benefit estimates may be obtained through [Member Access](#) or from PEBA, are projected based on information you provide and information in PEBA's records. Benefit estimates are subject to change upon review of your account after PEBA receives your retirement application.

## Eligibility

If you meet the following requirements, you are considered eligible to retire (see Correlated systems on Page 4 if you have an account in more than one retirement system).

## Normal retirement (unreduced benefit)

### Class Two members

- 28 years of service credit on the date of retirement, five years of which must be earned service credit; or
- Age 65 or older on the date of retirement with five years of earned service credit.

### Class Three members

- Meet the Rule of 90 requirement with at least eight years of earned service credit. This means that your age and years of service credit must add up to 90. For example, a member who is 56 years old and has at least 34 years of service credit, eight years of which must be earned service credit, would be eligible for normal retirement; or
- Age 65 or older on the date of retirement with eight years of earned service credit.

## Early retirement (reduced benefit)

### Class Two members

- Age 60 with at least five years of earned service credit. Your benefit is permanently reduced 5 percent for each year of age less than 65; or
- Age 55 or older with 25 years of service credit, five years of which must be earned service credit. Your benefit is permanently reduced 4 percent for each year of service credit less than 28. Benefit adjustment restrictions apply (see Page 19).

### Class Three members

- Age 60 with at least eight years of earned service credit. Your benefit is permanently reduced 5 percent for each year of age less than 65.

## Retiree health insurance eligibility

The eligibility requirements for a service benefit and for retiree health insurance are not the same. If you are covered by the state's health insurance program, be sure to read the eligibility requirements in the [Insurance Benefits Guide](#) or contact the Customer Contact Center at 803.737.6800 or 888.260.9430 for eligibility information. If your employer does not participate in the state's employee health insurance program, contact your employer for information about insurance in retirement.

## Average final compensation

Your average final compensation, commonly referred to as AFC, is an important part of the formula used to calculate your retirement benefit.

If you are a Class Two member, your AFC is the 12 highest consecutive quarters of earnable compensation in which you made regular member contributions and were earning service credit. An amount up to and including 45 days' termination pay for unused annual leave at retirement may be included in your AFC calculation. For an elected official, AFC may be calculated as the average annual earnable compensation for the 36 consecutive months before the expiration of the elected official's term of office.

If you are a Class Three member, your AFC is the 20 highest consecutive quarters<sup>2</sup> of earnable compensation in which you made regular member contributions and were earning service credit. Termination pay for unused annual leave at retirement is not included in the AFC calculation.

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<sup>2</sup>A quarter means a period January through March, April through June, July through September or October through December.



## Estimated benefit

One of PEBA's goals is to start your benefit payment as soon as possible so that you are not without income once you terminate employment. To make this possible, your initial benefit payment does not include any credit for unused sick or annual leave, if applicable, nor does it include your final earnable compensation information. Until all of this information is received from your employer, you will receive an estimated benefit.

If you are a Class Two member, after your employer submits your final earnable compensation information, which is in the form of quarterly retirement contributions, PEBA will audit the retirement contributions for your 12 highest consecutive quarters of earnable compensation. For work performed after December 31, 2012, your AFC does not include any overtime pay not mandated by your employer. Your AFC may be adjusted after the audit if any of the contributions included in the AFC calculation were for any payments not considered a part of your regular earnable compensation base. Your AFC will also be adjusted according to statute to include payment for your unused annual leave (see Unused leave at retirement on Page 16). Your service credit will also be adjusted to include credit for up to 90 days of unused sick leave.

If you are a Class Three member, you will have retirement contributions for your 20 highest consecutive quarters of earnable compensation audited. Your earnable compensation does not include any overtime pay not mandated by your employer. You will not receive service credit for unused sick leave at retirement, nor will payment at retirement for your unused annual leave be included in the calculation of your AFC.

As a result of the information received from your employer and the audit of the contributions for

your highest consecutive quarters of earnable compensation, your retirement benefit will be finalized. The final amount may be less than, or more than, your estimated benefit.

## Service retirement benefit calculations

### Class Two members

The four-step formula below is used to calculate your Class Two monthly benefit based on the Option A maximum payment plan described on Page 17.

|               |                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Step 1</b> | Total your 12 highest consecutive quarters of earnable compensation and allowable annual leave payout and divide by 3. <sup>3</sup> This equals your AFC. |
| <b>Step 2</b> | Multiply the result of Step 1 by 1.82% (0.0182).                                                                                                          |
| <b>Step 3</b> | Multiply the result of Step 2 by years, months and days of service. <sup>4</sup>                                                                          |
| <b>Step 4</b> | Divide the result of Step 3 by 12.                                                                                                                        |

### Class Two example

|                                                                                |                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| For a Class Two member with 28 years of service credit and an AFC of \$30,000: |                                                 |
| <b>Step 1</b>                                                                  | <b>Step 2</b>                                   |
| \$30,000                                                                       | \$546                                           |
| × 0.0182                                                                       | × 28 years                                      |
| <b>\$546</b>                                                                   | <b>\$15,288</b>                                 |
| <b>Step 3</b>                                                                  | <b>The Option A monthly benefit is \$1,274.</b> |
| \$15,288                                                                       |                                                 |
| ÷ 12 months                                                                    |                                                 |
| <b>\$1,274</b>                                                                 |                                                 |

<sup>3</sup>The dollar amount of payment for up to 45 days of unused annual leave paid by a Class Two member's last employer at retirement may be included before averaging the member's 12 highest consecutive quarters of earnable compensation.

<sup>4</sup>Convert months to days and divide the total days by 360 to determine a decimal equivalent for partial years. For example, 25 years, 2 months and 10 days equals 25 years, 70 days (60 plus 10). 70 divided by 360 equals .19. This amounts to 25.19 years of service.

**Unused leave at retirement**

**Annual leave**

Only an amount up to and including 45 days’ pay for unused annual leave from a Class Two member’s last termination payment will be included before averaging the member’s 12 highest consecutive quarters of earnable compensation (see Step 1 of the benefit formula).

**Sick leave**

At retirement, a Class Two member may receive service credit for up to 90 days of unused sick leave from the member’s last employer at no cost to the member (see Step 3 of the benefit formula). This service credit cannot be used to establish retirement eligibility. Sick leave is reported by a Class Two member’s employer after retirement. One month of service credit is granted for each 20 days of sick leave.

**School district and higher education employees**

Adjustments may be required so that you receive credit for three full years of earnings. Such adjustments may include changes in payroll cycles, contract payouts and any other occurrence that could potentially cause the AFC to include more or less than three full years of earnings.

**Class Three members**

The four-step formula below is used to calculate your Class Three monthly benefit based on the Option A maximum payment plan described on Page 17.

|               |                                                                                                            |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Step 1</b> | Total your 20 highest consecutive quarters of earnable compensation and divide by 5. This equals your AFC. |
| <b>Step 2</b> | Multiply the result of Step 1 by 1.82% (0.0182).                                                           |
| <b>Step 3</b> | Multiply the result of Step 2 by years, months and days of service. <sup>5</sup>                           |
| <b>Step 4</b> | Divide the result of Step 3 by 12.                                                                         |

**Class Three example**

|                                                                                                                            |                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| For a Class Three member who is age 60 with 30 years of service credit (satisfying the Rule of 90) and an AFC of \$30,000: |                                                 |
| <b>Step 1</b>                                                                                                              | <b>Step 2</b>                                   |
| \$30,000                                                                                                                   | \$546                                           |
| × 0.0182                                                                                                                   | × 30 years                                      |
| <b>\$546</b>                                                                                                               | <b>\$16,380</b>                                 |
| <b>Step 3</b>                                                                                                              | <b>The Option A monthly benefit is \$1,365.</b> |
| \$16,380                                                                                                                   |                                                 |
| ÷ 12 months                                                                                                                |                                                 |
| <b>\$1,365</b>                                                                                                             |                                                 |

**Unused leave at retirement**

Class Three members will not receive service credit for any unused sick leave at retirement and any pay you receive at termination for unused annual leave will not be included in the calculation of your average final compensation.

<sup>5</sup>Convert months to days and divide the total days by 360 to determine a decimal equivalent for partial years. For example, 25 years, 2 months and 10 days equals 25 years, 70 days (60 plus 10). 70 divided by 360 equals .19. This amounts to 25.19 years of service.

## Payment options at retirement

There are three monthly benefit payment options available to you at retirement. Select the option that best suits your needs. Generally, your payment option may not be changed once your benefit is first payable.

### Option A

#### **Maximum retiree only monthly benefit**

This option provides the maximum monthly benefit available and will pay you a lifetime benefit based on your average final compensation, years of service and a multiplier (0.0182). After your death, PEBA will return, through a lump-sum payment to your beneficiary or your estate, the remaining balance of any member contributions and interest, including any working retiree contributions, not exhausted through receipt of your benefit during your retirement.

### Option B

#### **100%-100% joint retiree-survivor monthly benefit**

You will receive a reduced (from Option A) monthly benefit for life. After your death, the same benefit (100 percent of your reduced monthly benefit, including granted benefit adjustments) will continue throughout your beneficiary's lifetime. If all of your designated beneficiaries predecease you, your benefit will revert to Option A, including any benefit adjustments granted since your retirement date.

You may select Option B only if your designated beneficiary is your spouse, or you designate multiple beneficiaries or a sole beneficiary who is not your spouse and who is within the 10-year age difference limits allowed by an Internal Revenue Code (IRC) formula. The non-spousal limits do not apply if the non-spousal beneficiary is older than you, or in the case of disability retirement or

death benefits. If, based on the IRC formula, the adjusted age difference for you and a non-spousal beneficiary exceeds the IRC limits, Option B would not be available to you. You would be able to select Option C, however, with no IRC restrictions.

### Option C

#### **100%-50% joint retiree-survivor monthly benefit**

You will receive a reduced (from Option A) monthly benefit for life. After your death, one-half of the benefit (50 percent of your reduced monthly benefit, including granted benefit adjustments) will continue throughout your beneficiary's lifetime. If all of your designated beneficiaries predecease you, your benefit will revert to Option A, including any benefit adjustments granted since your retirement date.

### Choosing Option B or Option C

If you choose Option B or Option C and name multiple beneficiaries, after your death your benefit will be divided equally among those beneficiaries. The benefit will not change for the remaining beneficiaries if one beneficiary dies, either before or after the member dies.

If you select Option B or Option C and all of your designated beneficiaries predecease you, your benefit will revert to Option A effective in the month following the month the last beneficiary died. You must notify PEBA upon the death of a beneficiary.

## Approximate amount of Option A monthly benefit at retirement

The information in the table below is based on Option A. Choosing Option B or Option C to provide a future benefit for beneficiaries will reduce the amount of your monthly benefit. Early retirement reductions may also apply; see Page 17 for more details.

| AFC       | Years of service |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         | Additional monthly benefit for each additional year |
|-----------|------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------------------------------------------|
|           | 5 <sup>6</sup>   | 10      | 15      | 20      | 25      | 28      | 30      | 35      | 40      |                                                     |
| \$20,000  | \$152            | \$303   | \$445   | \$607   | \$758   | \$849   | \$910   | \$1,062 | \$1,213 | \$30                                                |
| \$25,000  | \$190            | \$379   | \$569   | \$758   | \$948   | \$1,062 | \$1,138 | \$1,327 | \$1,517 | \$38                                                |
| \$30,000  | \$228            | \$455   | \$683   | \$910   | \$1,138 | \$1,274 | \$1,365 | \$1,593 | \$1,820 | \$46                                                |
| \$35,000  | \$265            | \$531   | \$796   | \$1,062 | \$1,327 | \$1,486 | \$1,593 | \$1,858 | \$2,123 | \$53                                                |
| \$40,000  | \$303            | \$607   | \$910   | \$1,213 | \$1,517 | \$1,699 | \$1,820 | \$2,123 | \$2,427 | \$61                                                |
| \$45,000  | \$341            | \$683   | \$1,024 | \$1,365 | \$1,706 | \$1,911 | \$2,048 | \$2,389 | \$2,730 | \$68                                                |
| \$50,000  | \$379            | \$758   | \$1,138 | \$1,517 | \$1,896 | \$2,123 | \$2,275 | \$2,654 | \$3,033 | \$76                                                |
| \$55,000  | \$417            | \$834   | \$1,251 | \$1,668 | \$2,085 | \$2,336 | \$2,503 | \$2,920 | \$3,337 | \$83                                                |
| \$60,000  | \$455            | \$910   | \$1,365 | \$1,820 | \$2,275 | \$2,548 | \$2,730 | \$3,185 | \$3,640 | \$91                                                |
| \$65,000  | \$493            | \$986   | \$1,479 | \$1,972 | \$2,465 | \$2,760 | \$2,958 | \$3,450 | \$3,943 | \$99                                                |
| \$70,000  | \$531            | \$1,062 | \$1,593 | \$2,123 | \$2,654 | \$2,973 | \$3,185 | \$3,716 | \$4,247 | \$106                                               |
| \$75,000  | \$569            | \$1,138 | \$1,706 | \$2,275 | \$2,844 | \$3,185 | \$3,413 | \$3,981 | \$4,550 | \$114                                               |
| \$80,000  | \$607            | \$1,213 | \$1,820 | \$2,427 | \$3,033 | \$3,397 | \$3,640 | \$4,247 | \$4,853 | \$121                                               |
| \$85,000  | \$645            | \$1,289 | \$1,934 | \$2,578 | \$3,223 | \$3,610 | \$3,868 | \$4,512 | \$5,157 | \$129                                               |
| \$90,000  | \$683            | \$1,365 | \$2,024 | \$2,730 | \$3,413 | \$3,822 | \$4,095 | \$4,778 | \$5,460 | \$137                                               |
| \$95,000  | \$720            | \$1,441 | \$2,161 | \$2,882 | \$3,602 | \$4,034 | \$4,323 | \$5,043 | \$5,763 | \$144                                               |
| \$100,000 | \$758            | \$1,517 | \$2,275 | \$3,033 | \$3,792 | \$4,247 | \$4,550 | \$5,308 | \$6,067 | \$152                                               |
| \$110,000 | \$834            | \$1,668 | \$2,503 | \$3,337 | \$4,171 | \$4,671 | \$5,005 | \$5,839 | \$6,673 | \$167                                               |

<sup>6</sup>SCRS early retirement reduction may apply.

## Post-retirement information

### Monthly benefit payments

Monthly benefit payments are directly deposited into your bank account on the last business day of each month. Electronic distribution of monthly benefit payments reduces risks and transaction costs for both benefit recipients and the retirement plan. You may add or change your direct deposit information any time by logging in to [Member Access](#) or completing a [Direct Deposit Authorization](#) (Form 7204).

### Taxes

The taxable portion of your monthly benefit and any death benefit payments to your beneficiary are subject to federal and state income taxes. Since tax laws are complex and constantly changing, be sure to check with an accountant or a tax advisor about your tax liability, or visit the IRS's website at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) and the website for the tax agency in the state in which you reside. In South Carolina, visit the South Carolina Department of Revenue's website at <https://dor.sc.gov>.

### Additional information for disability retirees Disability applications received by PEBA prior to January 1, 2014

If you are an SCRS member who applied for disability retirement and whose application was received by PEBA prior to January 1, 2014, and you are receiving a disability benefit, the disability benefits paid to you by PEBA are reported annually on IRS Form 1099-R as normal distributions for income tax purposes. This is in accordance with IRS guidelines, which also direct usage of various codes to reflect the taxability of a payment, or distribution, for income tax purposes. PEBA is required to use a code 7 in box 7 of your Form 1099-R rather than a code 3 because the disability program for applications received by PEBA prior

to January 1, 2014, is an occupational or job-related disability program rather than a total and permanent disability program as described in section 72(m)(7) of the Internal Revenue Code. A code 7 in box 7 of your Form 1099-R means that you are not subject to the 10 percent tax penalty for early withdrawal because you receive your retirement benefits through a monthly benefit; however, these benefits should be included as ordinary income for tax purposes.

Although the Form 1099-R you receive from PEBA correctly contains a code 7 in box 7, you may also receive monthly benefits from the Social Security Administration and be considered totally and permanently disabled for Social Security purposes. If you are considered totally and permanently disabled for Social Security purposes, you may qualify for the [Credit for the Elderly or the Disabled](#). Please refer to [Schedule R](#) when completing your tax return. You must keep for your records a copy of your physician's statement, which certifies that you were permanently and totally disabled on the date that you retired.

### Disability applications received by PEBA after December 31, 2013

For SCRS disability benefits paid to a member who applied for disability retirement and whose application was received by PEBA after December 31, 2013, PEBA will report your disability benefits annually to the IRS on Form 1099-R using a code 3 because disability retirees must be entitled to and receiving benefits from the Social Security Administration. This means disability retirees are considered totally and permanently disabled for Social Security and PEBA purposes.

### Benefit adjustments

Per current state law, effective each July 1, eligible SCRS retirees are to receive an annual benefit adjustment of 1 percent of their annual benefit up

to a maximum of \$500 per year. The increase will be reflected in benefit payments issued on the last business day of July since benefits are payable the last business day of the month.

The earliest you can receive a benefit adjustment is the second July 1 after your date of retirement. Class Two members who retire under the early retirement provisions at age 55 with 25 years of service are not eligible for benefit adjustments until the earlier of the second July 1 after they reach age 60 or the second July 1 after the date they would have had 28 years of service credit had they not retired.

**Non-working retired member  
incidental death benefit**

As a non-working retiree, if you die and your last employer prior to retirement provides incidental death benefit coverage (see Page 8), a payment based on your service credit will be paid to your beneficiaries as follows:

| Years of<br>service credit | Incidental death<br>benefit payment |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 10 to 19 years             | \$2,000                             |
| 20 to 27 years             | \$4,000                             |
| 28 or more years           | \$6,000                             |

Amounts paid to your beneficiary are considered taxable benefits; therefore, federal taxes will be withheld unless your beneficiary rolls over the money into another qualified retirement plan. It is up to your beneficiary to request that state taxes be withheld from the payment.

**Returning to covered employment**

To retire, you must first have a complete, bona fide severance or termination of employment. After 30 days of retirement, you may be hired by an employer covered by one of the retirement systems administered by PEBA. If you return to

covered employment sooner than 30 consecutive calendar days after retirement, your monthly benefit will be suspended while you remain employed by a covered employer.

**Earnings limitation**

**From covered employment: service retiree**

If you retire before you reach age 62 and return to covered employment, you will be subject to a \$10,000 per year earnings limitation. This means you can earn up to \$10,000 per year from covered employment and continue to receive your retirement benefit. If you continue covered employment after earning more than \$10,000 in a calendar year, your monthly retirement benefit will be suspended for the remainder of that year. The \$10,000 earnings limitation applies regardless of your age when you return to covered employment. For example, if you retire at age 58 with 30 years of service and return to covered employment when you are 63 years old, you would still be subject to the \$10,000 earnings limitation since you retired before you reached age 62.

The \$10,000 earnings limitation from covered employment does not apply to members who retired prior to January 2, 2013, or members who retire after age 62. In addition, the limitation does not apply to compensation for service as an elected official, service as an appointee of the Governor with confirmation by the South Carolina Senate or service by appointment or election by the General Assembly.

**Critical needs teachers’ exemption**

Under certain circumstances, a retired member may return to covered employment without affecting his monthly retirement benefit if he is a certified teacher and is employed by a school district to teach in the classroom in his area of certification. The \$10,000 earnings limitation does not apply if the State Department of Education



determines that no qualified, non-retired member is available for employment in the position, and that a certified teacher is teaching in a critical academic need area or a geographic need area as defined by the State Board of Education, or that a retired certified school teacher or certified employee is employed in a school or school district that has received a below average or unsatisfactory academic performance rating pursuant to the Education Accountability Act. After approval is received from the Department of Education, school districts must notify PEBA of the member's exemption from the earnings limitation.

#### **From all employment: disability retiree**

Please see the Returning to employment while receiving a disability retirement benefit section on Page 9 for information about the calendar year earnings limitation for disability retirees.

### **Employment status**

Any retired member who is employed by an agency that adheres to state personnel policies will be exempt from the State Employee Grievance Procedure Act. This means your employment is at will. If, as a retired member, you return to work for an employer that is not governed by state personnel policies, you would be subject to your employer's policies regarding employment status and rights.

### **Working 48 continuous months**

If you return to employment and work 48 continuous months for a covered employer with an annual earnable compensation of at least 75 percent of the AFC used to calculate your monthly benefit, you may elect to cease your monthly benefit and become an active member of SCRS (or PORS, if applicable). If you become an active member again, you have the option to repay some or all retirement benefits to receive additional

service credit for that period of time. When you subsequently retire, your monthly benefit will be calculated as if you were retiring for the first time. TERI participation does not count toward the 48-month period. If you begin this process for the purpose of establishing eligibility for retiree health insurance, please contact PEBA for assistance.

### **Working retired member incidental death benefit**

If you are a working retired member and your employer participates in incidental death benefit coverage, a payment equal to your current annual earnable compensation will be paid to your beneficiary if you die while in service. Amounts paid to your beneficiary are considered taxable benefits; therefore, federal taxes will be withheld unless your beneficiary rolls over the money into another qualified retirement plan. It is up to your beneficiary to request that state taxes be withheld from the payment.

### **Working retired member contribution rate**

If you return to work for a covered employer after you retire, you will contribute the same tax-deferred percentage of your gross pay into your SCRS retirement account as an active member. The member contribution rate is 9 percent. As a working retiree, you will not earn additional service credit or receive interest on your account.

## Beneficiary and payment option changes

### Retired member incidental death benefit

You may change your beneficiary for the incidental death benefit at any time regardless of the payment option you selected.

#### Option A

You may change your beneficiary for retirement benefits at any time. If you have a change in marital status (death of spouse, marriage, divorce), you may also select a new payment option within five years of the qualifying event.

#### Option B and Option C

If all of your beneficiaries predecease you, your monthly benefit will revert to Option A effective in the month following the month the last beneficiary died. You must notify PEBA upon the death of a beneficiary. You may then designate a new beneficiary under Option A.

If you have a change in marital status (death of spouse, marriage, divorce), you may also select a new payment option and designate a new beneficiary within five years of the qualifying event.

#### Payment option change limitation

Your form of monthly payment may not be changed more than twice regardless of the number of events (death of a designated beneficiary or change in marital status) that occur. A reversion to Option A after the death of your beneficiary will count as one of the two changes. If a second beneficiary predeceases you after you have again selected Option B or Option C, you will revert automatically to Option A; however, no further form of payment changes will be allowed. Changes in form of payment occurring before January 1, 2001, are not included in the limitation provision.

## More information

Be sure to visit PEBA's website at [www.peba.sc.gov](http://www.peba.sc.gov) for additional information, resources and tools. You can also estimate your retirement benefit in [Member Access](#).

PEBA uses various social media platforms to communicate with employers, members, the media and other stakeholders. We invite you to take advantage of these communications tools by liking us on [Facebook](#) and following us on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#). We encourage you to join the conversation.

You may also contact PEBA by telephone at 803.737.6800 or 888.260.9430, by email at [www.peba.sc.gov/contactus.html](mailto:www.peba.sc.gov/contactus.html) or by live chat by clicking on the Customer Service Chat Now button at the top of the PEBA home page. Please note that PEBA does not answer questions about a specific individual's benefits through Live Chat.

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